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Benefits for the father from their involvement in the labour and birth sequence

Emília Carvalho Coutinho^{a*}, Joana Gomes Vilaça Cardoso Antunes^b, João Carvalho Duarte^a, Vitória Castro Parreira^c, Cláudia Margarida Balula Chaves^a, Paula Alexandra Batista Nelas^a

^aHealth School of Viseu, CI&DETS – Polytechnic Institute of Viseu, Portugal, R. D. João Crisóstomo Gomes de Almeida n° 102 3500-843 Viseu, Portugal, Telephone 232419100, Fax 232428343

^bHospital de São Bernardo- Setúbal, R. Camilo Castelo Branco 2910-446 Setúbal, Portugal, Telephone 265549000, Fax 265238066

^cOporto Higher Nursing school - Rua Dr. António Bernardino de Almeida, 4200-072 Oporto, Portugal, Telephone 225073500, Fax 225096337

Abstract

The link between father and child is fundamental, the presence of the former in the birthing room being essential to closer links between the triad. The purpose of this study is to identify the benefits for the father from their involvement during the labor and birth sequence. An integrational review of the literature was carried out together with research on the databases: PubMed, LILACS, SciELO, Institutional Holdings and Digital Libraries and EBSCO Host published between 2000 e 2014. The results demonstrate the existence of a 'new' father who is involved in the consultations during the pregnancy and preparations for the birth, his presence in the birthing room making him feel that he is playing an active part in the process encourages him to develop closer and more intimate links leading to a consolidation of the family unit, the assumption of a parental role in addition to being able to share the experience of the birth with the mother and contribute to her well-being. The team of health professionals has a crucial role in the integration of the father into the process of maternity with his presence also being reflected in the humanization of health care.

It may be concluded that there are many benefits from paternal involvement in the birth when accompanying the mother from the moment of pregnancy with an active presence during the birth and enjoying the entire process by sharing emotions and feelings and contributing to the humanization of care and an affective link between the triad.

The performance of the Specialist Nursing Staff in the areas of Maternal health and Obstetrics is reflected in the inclusion of the father in the birthing room and in the de-mythification of taboos.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: 00351232419100; fax: 00351232428343

E-mail address: ecoutinhoessv@gmail.com

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Keywords: Father; Birth; father involvement; new-born

1. Introduction

The birth of a child is an event of great significance for the parents. It is taken as a turning point in the life of the couple, the arrival of the parenthood stage, a new situation which arrives with fears, expectations and the assumption of new roles.

In the past the male figure was associated with their work outside of the home and that of the mother confined to work in the home and the care of the children and therefore the functions assumed by fathers and mothers were traditionally distinct (Oliveira et al 2009).

The mother performed the role of care-giver while the father took care of the material needs of the family. The father was often a distant figure of authority who was largely unconcerned with the care to be given to the children and leaving the mother as the affective reference for the children (Oliveira et al 2009).

These roles were further reinforced at the time of birth which once took place in a family environment with the help of other women, midwives or godmothers who had empirical knowledge of the birthing process (Antunes et al 2014).

Gradually and over time a transfer of the birthing process to a hospital context has been witnessed. Women began to seek out health professionals and in particular doctors as these were believed to be able to provide greater security at the time of birth rather than the midwives of the past (Santos & Shimo 2008).

As a result of this change, one of the most significant losses was the support of the family. With the institutionalization of the birthing process, the mother became the subject of interaction with the team of health professionals, obstetric assistance being marked by technical care through the use of technology (Motta 2015).

Subsequent to this uprooting, the mother began to experience the moment of giving birth surrounded by strangers and far from the family environment. As a result the need arose for bringing a significant other person into the hospital environment so that the mother would feel herself accompanied and supported during the event which, in addition to being highly physical and emotional, brings about substantial transformations.

The support of a significant other can be crucial in the memories which the mother will retain at such a complex time in her life due to the process of labor and giving birth to a child. If all of this support brings many physical and emotional benefits to the mother by making her feel calmer in the knowledge that there is someone who is a support and can be depended upon during the birth and at such a delicate moment, the father as a significant other is also present and thus can benefit from an experience which previously was unthinkable.

For the father, the right to witness the birth of his child was not recognized although this practice has changed over recent decades through their desire to remain at the side of their partner, not just as a spectator but also as an active participant in living through this unique experience (Garcés 2011).

In Portugal it was in June 1985 that the pregnant mother was granted the right to be accompanied during labor by the decree-law number 14/85. It was this legal measure that encouraged the inclusion of the father at the time of the birth so that he became a central figure along with the mother and the baby waiting to be born and becoming an integral part of the birth of the child.

The father of the child may be considered to be an ideal companion for the mother during labor due to factors such as the forming of a bond and the representation of family links, as having witnessed the birth of the child affirms their parenthood and values their parental role (Storti 2004).

The current conception of paternity as understood by Carvalho & Brito (2008) establishes that, in addition to the father having greater closeness to the child, they are an active participant not only at the conception but also during the pregnancy, birth and postpartum.

It was stated by He et al (2015) that there are factors which can change the opinion and the experience of the parents during the moment of birth including age, education, employment and the existence of any previous visit to

the site where the child is to be born. They also indicate that younger parents are the ones in greatest need of support, essentially from health professionals, so that they have a more active experience of the process of giving birth.

The presence of the father at the moment of birth, accompanying the evolution of the labor and the birth sequence and constantly supporting the mother has consequences in the accomplishment of the birth of the baby which will undoubtedly be long remembered in the life of the couple (Perdommi & Bonilha 2011).

In sum, greater emphasis is given to the figure of the father both during the pregnancy as well as during the birth of the baby. The evolution has been slow although today it is possible to speak of a new father who is more participative and active during the pregnancy and grateful for the opportunity, contributing to the concept of the pregnant mother being left behind to be replaced by the pregnant couple. As Coutinho et al (2014 p. 2895) state, the father of the child regards his presence at the birth as a “privilege which brings benefits not only to the mother but also to himself as a member of the triad”.

Method

This is an integrational review of the literature. In its genesis, this type of review provides a summary of the evidence by means of a specific intervention strategy by means of the application of explicit and systemized search methods, critical appraisal and synthesis of the information selected (Linde e Willich, p. 17-22, 2003).

As such, the bibliographical research included articles and works which appear in the following databases: US National Library of Medicine National Institutes of Health (PubMed), Literatura Latino Americana e do Caribe em Ciências da Saúde (LILACS), Scientific Electronic Library Online (SciELO), Repositórios Institucionais e Bibliotecas Digitais e EBSCO Host, published between 2000 and 2014.

The research carried out used the following key words: “Father”, “Childbirth”, “Father Involvement” and “Newborn”, which are used equally in English and Portuguese by means of the Boolean operators AND and OR.

The selection of the texts was based on the following inclusion criteria: articles in Portuguese or Brazilian Portuguese and English with a publication year between 2000 and 2014 and which included the presence of at least one of the above-mentioned key words with complete texts with free access. Texts and articles were excluded under exclusion criteria as incomplete where these were not available on-line and in full along with texts with content which did not refer to the matter in question in spite of the title suggesting to the contrary. The research was undertaken between the 7th and the 28th of January 2015. Of the 105 texts initially obtained, nineteen (19) were selected, of which eleven (11) are in Portuguese with the remainder being in English.

Systematic reviews are particularly useful for integrating information from a range of studies carried out separately on a particular therapeutic action which may present conflicting and/or coinciding results as well as identifying matters which need evidence and aiding in the orientation of future investigations (Linde & Willich p. 17 – 22, 2003). In this sense, a meta-synthesis was carried out of all of the results obtained from the texts which comprise the sample and constituted categories and sub-categories of analysis, filtered by three researchers.

Question for investigation

The starting point question considered in this study sought to discover “What are the benefits for the father from their involvement in the labor and birth sequence?”

Objective

The objective set was: The identification of the benefits for the father of their involvement in the labor and birth sequence.

2. Results

Paternal involvement during the labor and birth sequence is increasingly appreciated having been widely studied by a range of researchers from a variety of perspectives. The image of the father in the course of the labor process is that of an icon, being seen as a key element in the birth process.

From the analysis made of the articles, six categories emerged relative to the benefits of paternal involvement in the labor and birth sequence for the father and set out in table 1: (I) The ability to feel to be an active participant in the labor and birth sequence; (II) To feel that positive sentiments are promoted along with feelings of gratitude; (III)

To feel to be included in preparations for the birth; (IV) To feel that there is an encouragement of affective bonds; (V) A greater degree of humanization of the care; (VI) The promotion of parenthood.

The category (I) The ability to feel to be an active participant in the labor and birth sequence is comprised of 17 sub-categories: (I) The ability to witness the birth of the child; (II) The ability to play a more active part in the birthing room; (III) The ability to collaborate; (IV) The ability to be involved in the birth; (V) The ability to feel useful; (VI) The ability to feel part of the team; (VII) The ability to form a team with their spouse/partner; (VIII) To feel to be one of the principal elements in the birth; (IX) The ability to demonstrate interest in actively participating in the birth; (X) The ability to demonstrate the wish to share in the birth of the child; (XI) The ability to feel that the couple is working as a team; (XII) The ability to feel to be a key element in the birth process; (XIII) Being helped to interact; (XIV) The ability to feel active and useful during the labor; (XV) The ability to attend the birth of the child with the mother-to-be; (XVI) The ability to be involved in caring for the newborn; (XVII) The ability to have the opportunity to cut the umbilical cord.

(II) To feel that positive sentiments are promoted along with feelings of gratitude; (I) The feeling of pride and satisfaction at the arrival of the baby; (II) The feeling of importance; (III) The ability to experience positive feelings; (IV) The ability to enjoy a gratifying experience; (V) To experience the emotion of becoming a father; (VI) To share the moment of becoming a parent with the partner/spouse; (VII) To jointly experience the birth as a positive and memorable moment; (VIII) To feel comfortable; (IX) To have negative feelings minimized.

(III) To feel to be included in preparations for the birth category is composed of 5 sub-categories: (I) The ability to prepare in advance for the moment of birth by attending birth preparation classes; (II) To get to know the birthing process better; (III) To have greater involvement in the pre-birth process; (IV) To be able to receive support in the context of the birth; (V) To have questions answered.

The category (IV) To feel that there is an encouragement of affective bonds is subject to 8 sub-categories; (I) The ability to hold the baby; (II) The ability to hear the baby's first sounds; (III) To encourage interaction with the baby; (IV) To feel that family bonds are being developed; (V) To feel that the bond with the baby is being promoted; (VI) To feel that there is promotion of bonds between the triad; (VII) The creation of greater intimacy about the pregnancy with the spouse/partner; (VIII) The consideration of the triad as being a whole.

The sub-categories in category (V) A greater degree of humanization of the care total 3; (I) Humanization of attention at the birth; (II) Receiving more humanized care on the part of health professionals; (III) The implementation of humanized practices.

The category (VI) The promotion of parenthood is particularly evident in the sub-category of effectively becoming parents.

Table 1- The benefits of paternal involvement in the labor and birth sequence for the father

Categories	N	Authors and respective reference
The ability to feel an active participant in the labor process	10	Brandão & Figueiredo (2012) - 105 Fathers Carvalho /2003/ 11 Fathers Carvalho & Brito / 2008 / 10 Fathers Espírito Santo & Bonilha /2000/ 14 Fathers / 3 Nursing staff e 3 Physicians Ferreira & Nogueira / 2012/ 222 Fathers Kainz et al/ 2010/ 67 Mothers Kaye et al/ 2014 / 16 Fathers Motta et al/ 2005/ 10 First-time mothers Perdomini & Bonilha /2011/ 4 Fathers Silveira et al, 2004 / 15 Fathers
To feel that positive sentiments and feelings of gratitude are encouraged	7	Perdomini & Bonilha/ 2011 / 24 Fathers Silveira et al/ 2004/ 15 Fathers Kainz et al/ 2010/ 67 Mothers Espírito Santo & Bonilha / 2000/ 14 Fathers, 3 Nursing staff e 3 Physicians

		Ferreira & Nogueira /2012 7 222 Fathers Motta et al/ 2005/ 10 First-time mothers Carvalho & Brito/ 2008/ 10 Fathers
To feel included in the preparations for the birth	5	Carvalho & Brito/ 2008/ 10 Fathers Ferreira & Nogueira / 2012/ 222 Fathers Li et al/ 2014/ 16 Fathers Perdomini & Bonilha /2011/ 24 Fathers Reddshaw & Henderson/2013/ 4616 Mothers
To feel that there is promotion of affective links	5	Brandão & Figueiredo (2012) - 105 Fathers Carvalho / 2003/ 11 Fathers Greer et al / 2014 / 19 Mothers and 19 Fathers Motta et al / 2005 / 10 First-time mothers Perdomini & Bonilha /2011 / 14 Fathers
Greater humanization of care	3	Caires & Vargens/ 2012 Carvalho /2003/ 11 Fathers Antunes et al / 2014/ 10 Fathers
Promotion of parenthood	1	Brandão & Figueiredo (2012) - 105 Fathers

3. Discussion

Paternal participation in the context of the birth process is an aspect which is increasingly in vogue and taken into consideration by health professionals and society in general. The birth process has ceased to be exclusively a part of the female experience which has permitted paternal entry into this unique context which is the birth of a child.

Fathers show themselves to be more preoccupied and dedicated to their family and not only in its financial aspects which historically predominated thus representing a new role to be performed in the exercise of paternity. This posture may bring about a rearrangement in the relationship between males and females and the achievement of joint responsibility between the spouses/partners covering the family environment and recent social configurations. Paternal understanding of the birthing process may serve as the basis for the structuring of more humanized attention from the part of health professionals now more concerned with the needs of the male as a companion, acting effectively in the support and welcoming of the female during the birthing process (Antunes et al 2014).

The presence of the father at the birth is expected and indicated as a measure which brings direct benefits to the spouse/partner, the new-born and the family. In the figure of the companion, the father may constitute more than just a presence providing that his active participation is permitted during the entire birthing process (Antunes et al 2014).

The father of the baby, by his presence, assumes a significant role for the expectant mother, his presence becoming a form of attention. The presence of the father and the fact of being someone who can help the mother means that both feel included in the context of the birth rather than feeling isolated or abandoned (Kainz et al 2010, Coutinho et al, 2014).

The involvement of fathers as participants in the birth promotes positive feelings and strengthens family bonds. For the father, the birth is an enriching experience which promotes the first contact with the new-born.

There are innumerable advantages for the mother-father-baby triad from the presence of the father in the labor and birth sequence, it being necessary for the health professionals to be aware of and to receive training in providing the father with a positive and gratifying experience (Ferreira & Nogueira, 2012).

From taking part in the process of birth the father feels himself to be an integral part of the event as well as useful in the light of the needs of his spouse/partner. His inclusion in the context of the birthing room is an incentive for

him to be a key element in the birth of the child and brings him benefits as he feels that he is an active part of and a participant in the whole context of maternity.

Fathers demonstrate a serious need to feel included in the preparations for the birth as in the entire pregnancy and thus be able to better define their paternity and so that becoming a parent is a more tranquil and active process of which they feel that they are an integral part.

Some fathers characterize their presence during the labor as an opportunity to give their support to their spouse/partner as well as a means to encouraging a more effective parenthood (Brandão e Figueiredo, 2012).

Increasingly, a crucial role is attributed to the team of health professionals who monitor the pregnancy and the labor and birth sequence for the integration of the father into these contexts.

As Levesque et al (2014) stress, it is important to consider and support not only the mother but also the father, adapting the care regime during the birthing process.

The maternal health and obstetrics specialist nurse (EESMO), in addition to the inclusion of the father in the context of the birth, has the role of actively contributing in this context so that, wherever possible, an opportunity is given to the father to care for the newborn child, promoting a closer link between the two from the moment of birth, providing him with moments in which he is able to affirm his becoming a parent and enjoy the child right from the moment of birth.

In this context, making it possible for the father to carry out some of the activities such as the cutting of the umbilical cord promotes his emotional involvement with the newborn child which converts the father from being a mere observer into an active participant in the birthing process, feeling himself useful and an integral part of this defining moment for him (Brandão & Figueiredo 2012).

It is important for there to be a greater incentive for the health professionals, so that paternal inclusion in the birthing scenario represents effective participation in breaking with myths and preconceptions by providing pertinent and accurate information on the pregnancy and the birth, thus contributing to the social reconstruction of the role of the male in the exercise of his parental role (Antunes et al, 2014).

4. Conclusion

Paternal presence at the birth is a matter which is increasingly in vogue although it is also a concept which is in need of study as well as a higher profile so as thus to be able to be more widely known about and accepted.

In the light of the results obtained it can be seen that there are numerous benefits deriving from paternal presence and involvement in the labor and birth sequence.

A father who is controlled, informed about the context of the birth and confident of the role that he will play in the birthing room is able to go through an enriching and unique experience for him and for the triad since he has the capacity to provide the maximum support to his spouse/partner and enjoy the moment of becoming a father.

The conclusion is that paternal involvement in the context of the birthing room brings benefits to all involved in this process to make it unique and a major shared moment for the couple.

It is essential for there to be an ongoing investment right from the start of the pregnancy in paternal inclusion so that the father will understand that he is also a part of the process which is one of its essential elements and that for the expectant mother, he is the most important person who might be at her side. A father who is prepared and conscious of his role during the birth becomes a key element in the birthing room.

The action of the health professionals in the encouragement of this paternal presence assumes particular relevance as these professionals are expected not only to introduce the male spouse/partner into the context of the birth but also to educate him so that he can play an active part in the birthing room and the assumption of his role as a father.

Recommendations to be put into practice:

The ongoing investigation of the presence of the father from any culture in the birthing room is recommendable in the sense of the better understanding of their wish to take part, their concerns, their anxieties, their behavior, thoughts and feelings in connection with the birth.

The creation of maternity support policies which allow the father to be prepared and involved from the preconception and to be able to accompany the development of the child from conception to birth.

These policies should likewise permit accompaniment by the health professional nurse specialists in maternal health and obstetrics with a view to not only monitoring the pregnancy and checking for any complications which

promote the clarification of questions and the de-mythification of taboos and anxieties which may arise in the context of the birth.

Conditions need to be created so that the father can be involved in the provision of care to the child so that he affirms himself and feels himself to be a key element in the birth process, a father trained so that he becomes the ideal companion for the expectant mother, promoting a positive experience in the labor and birth sequence for himself and for his spouse/partner.

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